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ABSTRACT

This guide describes how to implement an interdisciplinary black history project designed to explore black experiences through a combination of personal anecdotes and text research. The program was designed by a teacher at Satellite East Junior High School in Brooklyn (New York). An introduction gives an overview of the structure and aims of the program, which begins with research at the library on black history and interviews of three generations in the students family about their opinions and their experiences as Black persons and culminates in an assembly during which students and their relatives, teachers, and other staff gather to share personal experiences and to hold a mock-civil rights march. An overview further describes the goals and incentives to students. Another section describes activities, assignments, evaluations, and projects for the first 5 days of the project. A conclusion describes the personal experiences and enthusiasm for the project of the teacher who developed it. Attached are a letter sent to parents announcing the program, sample lesson plans for three classes, and a copy of the program and script from the assembly held at Satellite East Junior High School. (JB)

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Bringing Black History Home
Oral Sketches of the Black Experience
from Africa to Montgomery to Bedford-Stuyvesant

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Introduction

"Bringing Black History Home" is an anecdotal history that traces the multi-cultural experiences of black people from Africa to Montgomery, via South America and the Caribbean, and from the March on Washington to the streets of Bedford-Stuyvesant.

Compiling this historic overview and gathering stories of Black History as personal experience, begins with two homework assignments: 1) Go to the library and get five important facts on an assigned topic in Black History; 2) Interview three generations in your family about their opinions of events, issues and prominent figures in Black History. Also ask them about their experience as a Black person in America or elsewhere.

During the early stages of the project there is a real sense of anticipation and discovery in the classroom. This is because the students are not sure of how all the text and interview research they are conducting and bringing to class will come together. Frankly, the teacher shouldn't know either. Not right away. And be prepared for the full spectrum of emotional responses to some of the stories brought in by students. I learned something most everyday, and had to proctor or mediate debates several times a week.

The program culminates in an assembly -- we held ours in June -- in which students, their relatives, teachers and other school staff gather together to share personal experiences that are emblematic of periods recorded in Black History. The anecdotal histories and experiences are slotted in to the script, which provides a time line.

A mock-civil rights march, complete with placards bearing slogans of the period, and featuring students' relatives who marched on Washington or elsewhere provides the finale to this assembly. The chorus sings "We Shall Overcome" as the marchers circle the auditorium. Then, the 'real' marchers mount the stage and tell what it was like in Selma, Montgomery, Washington etc., and about the spirit they vowed to keep alive. (A copy of the program and script are attached.)

Overview

"Bringing Black History Home" is an interdisciplinary project designed to explore the black experience through a combination of personal anecdote and text research. However, the framework (assignments, lessons, objectives, skills) should be adaptable to any grade level or culture. It should even work for a study of a multitude of cultures.

"Bringing Black History Home" is introduced in the Language Arts class. It incorporates units from both the Social Studies and Math curriculum, and involves the family, friends and neighbors of the students, as well as the school's administrators, faculty and staff. The project's principal objective is to guide students in the use of Language Arts curriculum skills* to discover the rich, diverse culture of the black experience.

The aim of text research should be to establishing a Black History time-line. The time-line helps students to discover a connection between the Age of Exploration, an early unit in (seventh grade) Social Studies, and the emergence of the slave trade. Following this path, geographically and chronologically, students observe the introduction of many languages and cultures into the black experience, before it arrived in America. (Because my students' families immigrated from many different countries, this point was made most powerfully in anecdotal accounts.)

Incentives for students: Tell them from day one that they will make up a test and give it to their teachers and family! Another strong incentive, though less sensational, is that the students themselves are at the center of this project at every phase.

* Use of library research materials to complete both general and targeted research assignments, reading for content, note-taking, interviewing (e.g., use of closed and open questions), listening, presentation/speaking, organizing and outlining blocks of information, comparing and contrasting text and anecdotal history with historic fiction, writing (report, essay and poem), editing and rewriting, use of literary devices. Students utilize these skills in various formats, class-wide instructional lessons, cooperative learning groups, independent work (homework, interviews) and evaluation of interviews and materials presented in class for discussion and debate.

Getting Started

The program begins by wheeling a computer into the classroom, on the first day of February, and asking "How'd you like to give a test to your teachers, for a change?" Explain that the test will comprise information they gather about Black History. Then, they'll give it to their teachers and family members. (Their math teacher will use the results to teach statistics and data manipulation.)

"So what do you know about Black History?" Ask, record their responses, and ask some questions of your own.* Chose a student to keep track of the assignments.

By the end of the first class, every student has a research assignment -- "find five important facts about ...". (This begins to break the habit of copying from encyclopedia articles, and provides an opportunity to practice note-taking skills.) Since the assignment involves a library visit, the facts are due on the following Monday. Send home that first day with the attached letter advising families of the project and inviting their participation.

On the second day, began with a discussion of the day's homework assignment -- "Interview three generations in your family. ... Students will present interviews beginning February 15."

Build the day's lesson around two questions: "What is an interview?", "What kinds of questions are there?" Demonstrate different types of question -- general and specific and open and closed -- and explain their uses. To practice, pair all the students (listener and storyteller). Give each teller two minutes to relate a story. Listeners take notes, then have two minutes to ask questions. Guide a brainstorming session about good questions to ask at home, so the students set the interviews objectives.

Leave five to end each class with an oral quiz of the facts already in, what my classes dubbed, the "Black History Gallery". (I worked with four different seventh grade classes and assigned different research tasks to each, so there were always facts that are new to each class.) Allot three days a week to the presentation and discussion of the research materials in class. The "Gallery" grows, and the quizzes became more challenging, and a visible and satisfying source of the learning occurring. Aim to complete the 'Gallery' by mid-February.

* Get yourself a Black History calendar or encyclopedia from the library, and guide the listings so that there is representation of major events, legislation, people and court cases from every era.

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Composing the test -- Suggest that there be three types of questions -- stated fact, true-or-false and multiple choice. Stated fact questions are based on "Gallery" items the students believe everyone should know. True-or-false and multiple choice are composed for "Gallery" items the students believe everyone should be able to make an educated guess at. Before composing questions, guide a discussion about the difficulty of each type of question.

At this time, interviews are also due, so class-time is divided between presentations and composing the test. Students rate the presentations based on content, observations, clarity of speech, and appearance. Urge them to ask questions. These questions become material for follow-ups. For example, many students from the Caribbean initially came in with answers like "My family was not here when that happened." This raised an interesting question my students seemed not to have thought of before, "Is Black History limited to America?" Follow-ups provided us with history and race relations in the Caribbean, which ultimately provided their discovery of the link to early explorers and the slave trade.

The Creative Outlet -- Two homework assignments were given to provide students with a creative outlet to the thus far academic study of Black History, and to provide material for a student publication. 1) Write one paragraph beginning, "My role in Black History is ..." 2) Write phrases of alliteration, metaphors, similes or other figures of speech about Black History. The resulting publication was remarkably mature in its expression and scope. It included revelations and heart's-eye views of racism and growing up Black, saber-rattling rage, intense pride, blossoms of dignity, reflections on important people, places and events, and enhancing art work.

The tests were given, the results analyzed, the publication published and the presentations presented, and the month passed. In May, I took out my file and chose the presentations that generated the most enthusiasm. I also got on the phone to parents, and spoke to many elderly people in the community. The "Bringing Black History Home" project became a two-hour assembly program that drew the entire school, many family members and people from the community. (Program, script attached. Video tape available upon request, but the sound quality is poor.)

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Conclusion

The point: oral history is alive and well, and sadly untapped. If you use curricula skills to teach your students to tap it, you may find yourself on a voyage of discovery that will enliven your classroom time and curriculum. The number of curricula skills you bring to bear, and the type of assignments should be limited only by your imagination. The conclusions should be limited only by the experiences of your students' and their families.

I know the program works, because I witness a student involvement and enthusiasm that I could not on my own generate. Everyday I heard students tell their class a family story they admitted they'd never heard before, and saw the emotions that incited. I saw enough students in every class catch fire and goad the others on to tell their story. I saw them send others home to get more information, because they weren't satisfied with a student's curiosity and persistence. Most days, I couldn't wait to get to work.

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February 12, 1991

Dear Parents:

In recognition of Black History Month, seventh grade students at Satellite East will be involved in a unique project called "Bringing Black History Home". The objective is for the students to bring what they are learning into their homes, and to learn how major events and people in Black History have affected their families.

Part One: Students are presently compiling a Black History Gallery of important people, events, court cases and legislation. This involves research skills. They will then compose a test, which they will take home. Composing the test will involve problem-solving skills, and both independent and cooperative decision-making.

The test will then be taken home and given, ideally, to family members spanning three generations. You can help by taking the test, and ask your child to explain anything that is unfamiliar. The names of those they test will not be listed on the tests, just age, education, occupation and birth place. The results will be used by their math teacher, who will use the results to teach the handling and analyzing of data.

Part Two: Students are presently thinking and talking about questions they can ask to discover what impact Black History has had on the lives of people around them. For example, the students know about Rosa Parks' refusal to ride at the back of the bus, but they don't know if that type of segregation was practiced in Bedford-Stuyvesant or in the Caribbean Islands, or wherever their parents and grandparents were born. They know that was the beginning of "The Struggle" in the south with Dr. King leading the marches, but, in many cases, they don't know how that affected your days here in Brooklyn, or if you marched, or what your feelings were.

Such insights cannot be obtained from encyclopedia articles or biographies. Sharing your experience can help your child discover the real impact of Black History, and how they are connected to it. Your child will be asking to interview family members, please share your experiences, impressions and opinions. Students will discuss their findings during the last week of February.

If you have any questions please call. Thank you for your cooperation.

Subject: English, Mr. Levine, Lesson #89, Tuesday, 2/19
(This is a two or three-part lesson, the objective being to write a Black History Questionnaire, which students will administer to teachers and family members. In addition, the students will take this test. The test will have an interdisciplinary aspect. That is, when the results come in Mrs. McWilliams will use them to teach the students about analyzing data.)

Learning Objective: Students will begin to write questions based on their Black History Gallery, in preparation for a questionnaire that members of their family and teachers will be asked to take.

Motivation: Students make a test that teachers must take!!!

Materials: Students Black History Gallery, Apple-IIe.

P r o c e d u r e

1. Do Now: Write a list of leaders and events out of Black History that you think everyone should know.

2. Review Homework: N/A.

P r e s e n t a t i o n o f C o n t e n t

3. Inform students that they will take test, and the only way to prepare is to take notes as test is being written. Also, their test will not be true-or-false.

4. Elicit Do Now responses. Have a student write them on chalkboard. Elicit students' knowledge. Suggest that open-ended questions be written for these, and that the rest of the test be true-or-false, or multiple choice.

5. Elicit Open-ended questions for listings on board, and record the ones that reach consensus in a computer file marked Black History Questionnaire.

6. Read off some the names of people, events, documents, acts and cases in the students' Black History Gallery that are not listed on the board. Have another student write the names and events. Elicit students' knowledge. Elicit a closed, true-or-false or multiple choice question. Record the ones that reach consensus in the computer file.

M e d i a l S u m m a r y

7. Halfway through class read questions written, and elicit answers from class.

lesson #89/2

I n d e p e n d e n t P r a c t i c e

8. Continue formulating questions and testing student comprehension. Student participation in test-making process is the independent practice.

R e v i e w I n d e p e n d e n t P r a c t i c e

9. Student participation in test-making process.

T e r m i n a l R e v i e w

10. Read off test in-progress. Elicit responses.

H o m e w o r k #

- 1) Due Monday, February 25: "Taking Black History Home" Interviews .
- 3) Study for Black History of your own making.

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Subject: English, Mr. Levine, Lesson #92, Friday, 2/22
Learning Objective: Students will read and discuss the poem "Democracy" by Lanston Hughes.

Motivation: First in a series of Black poets introduced for Black History Month.

Materials: Reread the poem "Democracy".

P r o c e d u r e

1. Do Now: Read "Democracy", and write your first impression and one element of literature in the poem.
2. Review Homework: N/A.

P r e s e n t a t i o n o f C o n t e n t

3. Elicit responses to Do Now to establish theme and elements within "Democracy".
4. Ask students to select a line from the poem as a theme for a poem of their own, and begin working on it.

M e d i a l S u m m a r y

5. Circulate and ask students to stand, read and discuss their 'work-in-progress'.

I n d e p e n d e n t P r a c t i c e

6. Students sharing and discussing Hughes' poem, as well as their own.

R e v i e w I n d e p e n d e n t P r a c t i c e

7. Students sharing and discussing Hughes' poem, as well as their own.

T e r m i n a l R e v i e w

8. Review theme and elements of Hughes' poem, and themes chosen for student poems.

H o m e w o r k # 3 / 1 2

Complete poem started in class.

/10

(This is the first of a week-long lesson.)

Subject: English, Mr. Levine, Lesson #93, Monday, 2/25

Learning Objective: Students will read and discuss their "Bringing Black History Home" interviews.

Motivation: Reading about Black History from the thoughts and experiences of their families.

Materials: Students interviews.

P r o c e d u r e

1. Do Now: Take out interviews.

2. Review Homework: See Learning Objective and Presentation.

P r e s e n t a t i o n o f C o n t e n t

3. Establish criteria for listeners: Thoroughness of Interview; Follow-up Questions.

4. Students will come up to front of class and read interviews conducted at home. Listeners will write comments and questions.

5. Open floor for comments (which may include comparisons to commenter's own interview) and questions. Questions the presenters cannot answer will turn into follow-up assignments. They will be instructed to speak with that relative again and get the answer to questions posed in class.

M e d i a l S u m m a r y

6. On-going research reading and responding.

I n d e p e n d e n t P r a c t i c e

7. Students presentations, comments and questions.

R e v i e w I n d e p e n d e n t P r a c t i c e

8. Students presentations, comments and questions.

T e r m i n a l R e v i e w

9. What have we learned today that we can't find in textbooks, biographies or encyclopedia articles?

H o m e w o r k # /

1) Bring in interviews.

2) Conduct follow-ups as dictated by students' suggested follow-up questions.

BLACK HISTORY

A View From Satellite East Junior High School

Changes

Boy!! We gonna lynch you,
to your death and watch blood
drip from your mouth,
while you hang from a tree.
That's what the KKK said
to my father -
when I was a girl.
I swore to myself
to try to make a change.
Boycotts, civil rights
movements and a leader.
It was about time
something happened, when
I refused to give up
my seat to a white woman.

Sha-Kei Powell, 7-320

Black

We went through slavery,
Now babies are having babies.
We wanted freedom,
Now, we want drugs.
We fought for our rights,
Now, we fight for pay.
We say, "Free South Africa",
But we have killed America.
We have defined Black,
Now, we need to come back.

Malik Thomas, 7-312

Untitled

It was a hot, sunny day.
I was walking right behind him
on the March on Washington.
I was walking for freedom.
Even though the sun
was beating down on my face,
I just kept walking and walking
until the sun went down.

Tanisha Andrews, 7-326

Freedom

Freedom is Blacks.
Freedom is Whites.
Freedom is knowing
you're going to be
free tonight.
Freedom is standing
up for your rights.

Christine Harsford, 7-322

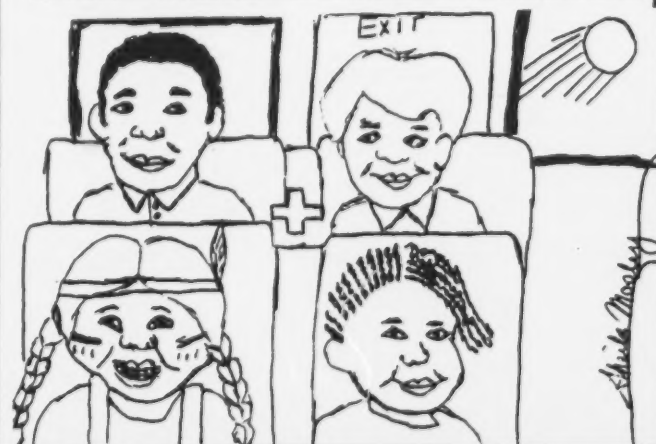
My Role in Black History

"In my own little way, I feel that I contribute to Black History by not doing anything to offend or make my culture look bad. I stand up for what I believe in, and when I feel that someone is dogging or degrading Blacks I speak out," **Renard Suggs, 7-322.**

"My role in Black History is to remember those who helped blacks have equal opportunities and accomplish many things. My role is to go to school and show the world that I am black and I'm not going to let anything keep me down," **Camara Francis, 7-326.**

"My role in Black History is to keep up my pride in being half Cherokee Indian and half Blackfoot Indian, which people can mistake for Puerto Rican," **Shontaye Miller, 7-312.**

"My role in Black History is yet to be played. Right now, I'm working on the script and the props. I am doing this by going to school and learning all I can, so that I can teach or deliver other children, so they can help the world grow. You don't have to be Black to be part of Black History. People from other races and cultures have also played a part in Black History," **Sheila Mosley, 7-320**



I Remember

I remember protesting
For equal rights.
I remember the pain.
The pain 'hurtin' so bad.
So bad I wanted to quit.
To quit the fight
For equal rights.
The fight didn't seem
to be doing anything.
I remember being lynched.

Meridith Whetsell, 7-326.

It's Time

The time has come
for all black people
to be one.
It's time for us
to walk the road
of freedom.
Yesterday
we were slaves,
shackled ankle and wrist.
Today we can
make a difference,
but if we don't learn
we'll shackle our brains.
Tomorrow
we will be masters.
It's time.

Megan World, 7-320.

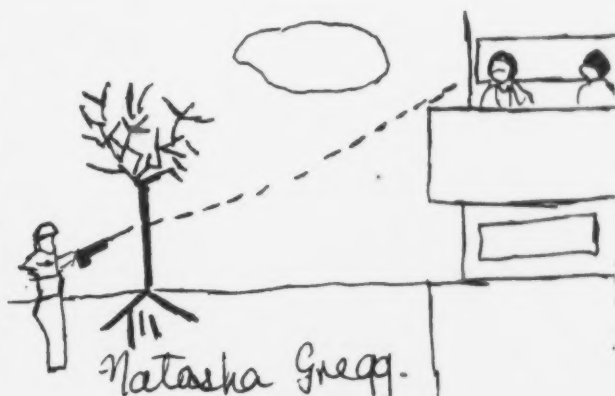
Untitled

As I walk through the Onion Field,
weeping as an old lady cries,
I remember Black History:

How one man's dream came true.
How one lady refused to give her seat.
Boycotts, people marching,
doing what they had to do.

As I walk through the Onion Field,
weeping as an old lady cries,
I remember Black History.

Laquan Bowens, 7-326.



Democracy

Democracy will not come
Today, this year
Nor ever
Through compromise and fear.

I have as much right
As the other fellow has
To stand
On my own two feet
And own the land.

I tire so of hearing people say,
Let things take their course.
Tomorrow is another day.
I do not need freedom when I'm dead.
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.

Freedom
Is a strong seed
Planted
In a great need.
I live here, too.
I want freedom
Just as you.

Langston Hughes

Contributors

7-312

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SLAVES?

By Sheila Mosley



A Few Measured Words On Black History

Alliteration

Langston Hughes used plenty of pencils, pens and paper to produce his poetry.

Harriet Tubman saved slaves from the sins and subordination of slavery. **Shakeha Bolden, 7-312.**

I'm an African-American Adolescent, bold, black and beautiful, dignified and distinguished. **Iman Marciano, 7-320.**

Fredrick Douglass was a brilliant, brave, black boy.

Harriet Tubman was an interesting, idealistic, intelligent woman.

Susan Katherine Anthony was a caring, creative, courteous woman.

Natasha Jones, 7-312.

Sweaty slaves stinking in the sunlight.

Blacks break out of big bars of bigotry for freedom.

Lakeisha Kinsey, 7-326.

Martin marched in Mississippi many times.

John Rushworm returned to the railroad. **Aladonna Bryan, 7-312.**

African Americans accomplished a lot.

Ku Klux Klan killed kind kids.

Keith Wade, 7-322.

Behold black beauty in Brooklyn.

Shala Bonyun, 7-312.

Slavery and segregation are sonny states. **Queneesha Smith, 7-320.**

Some slaves survived and succeeded.

Some people are proud and peaceful.

Take on the tall task, remember racial respect. **Shontaye Miller, 7-312.**

Slavery is a selfish and stupid thing. **Camara Francis, 7-326.**

Black boys being badly brutalized in Bensonhurst.

Garvey gave God's gift.

Prejudiced people should be

punished. **Raihanah Latif, 7-322.**

Medgar, Martin, Malcom and me.

Roderick Palton, 7-320.

Metaphor

Black songs plow the spirit.

Shakeha Bolden, 7-312.

My life is a book of Black America.

Meridith Whetsell, 7-326.

Black is unbreakable.

Rzania Boman, 7-320.

Slavery is a mouse caught in a trap. **Lakeisha Kinsey, 7-326.**

Simile

Freedom is like a cool summer's breeze. **Meridith Whetsell, 7-326.**

Slaves labored like a mother delivering a baby. **Lakeisha Kinsey, 7-326.**

Reading

Every afternoon I see
the white kids going to school.
About two o'clock they come home,
and sit on the steps
of their house reading.
I always think about reading
a book, but I don't know how.
I wish they would teach
me. I know one day
I will read with them.

Amina Francois, 7-326.

It is six o'clock in the morning.
I am loading my horse
that I have. Instead of me
riding the horse, I am pulling
the horse through this hot
miserable day. I am doing all
of the work, while the white
people are relaxing. I am tired
of racism and slavery.

Adrienne Hayes, 7-322.

First there were spirituals
and all those blues, that told
how people lives' were.
Then, there was jazz.
You had Satchmo, Duke
and many more.
Then, you had rock n' roll.
There were the Platters,
Little Ritchie and the King --
Chuck Berry.

Gregory Threadgill, 7-320.

Untitled

Every day I sit in the heat
and hope that I'll be free.
They make us cut down big trees
and chop up long stems in the field.
The long day goes by slowly,
with people fainting and weakening
from the hard work we must do.
As the night comes
we sleep in dens and hay.
The world is a big place
where I am and the moon
don't shine anymore.

Lakeisha Kinsey, 7-326.

Stop

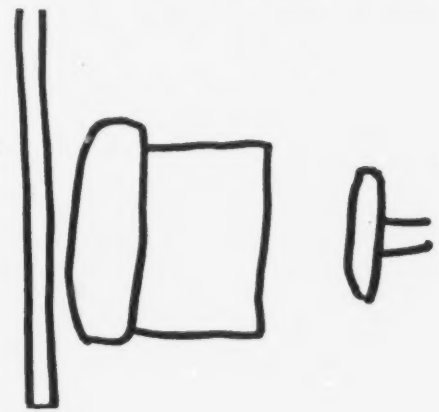
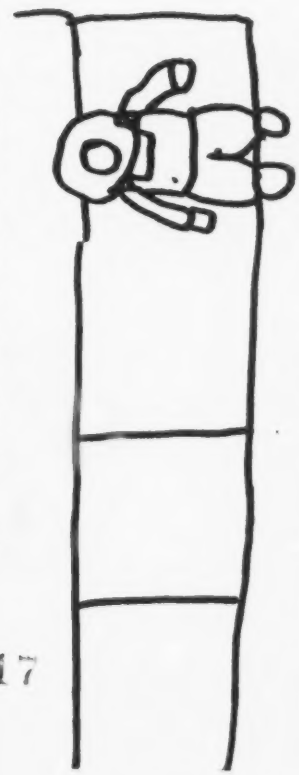
I walk through the fields
with cotton in my hands.
A strap tied on my belt
leads a horse
With a wagon I'm pushing.
All we do is work, and let
the white man beat us and laugh
at us. We hardly get a half
hour to drink water. Sometimes
we don't even drink water.
It's not fair. I'm tired
of working. I'm going to stop
working. I'm going to stop
the white man from beating
me and laughing
at me. I'm going to stop.

Alicia Russell, 7-326.

by Azania
Bumani

Rosa Parks

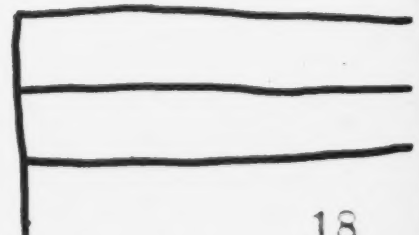
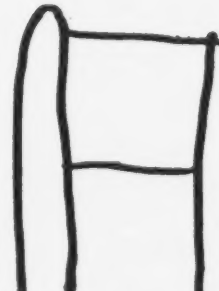
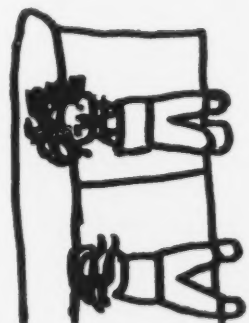
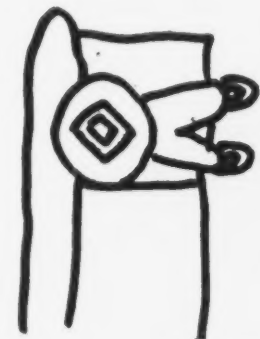
I will
not



Setup
from the
seat

#13

Setup
from her
seat



Untitled

Am I black or am I brown?
Either color, I am beautiful
in the sight of God.
Why should I be hated
by someone no better than I?
What color are they?
White, that's the color they are.
If they do think of themselves
as beautiful then they are,
same as me.

Amatullah Latif, 7-312.

The Struggle

As I look into the mirror
I look into my own eyes
and see the many scenes
of Black History, like a superbly
acted out movie.
I watch very closely
and see the struggle.
Oh, I've heard about it.
But now I'm seeing it
from the chains around my
ancestors' hands and ankles,
as they were dragged
from their homes, to the scars
left on their hands, necks
and backs from being treated
with pure evil.
At first, it is very scary seeing
people being treated so badly.
But as I look deeper,
I find, as people get wiser,
they see my people, the people
they treated with such cruelty,
are beautiful.
I see through the dark tunnel
of beatings and hangings
to a light where my people
are treated equally by everyone.
This day has not yet come,
and the struggle is not yet over.
But as long as I am alive
so will it be . . . alive.

Eyarna Gordon, 7-320.

Dream King

He had a dream.
He knew he would die
for that dream,
but he did not care.
There were black people
to be freed and today
we celebrate that
he had a dream.

Hifimba Roberts, 7-322.

Untitled

I am the darker one.
I gaze at the sun for freedom.
I go through the cotton fields
picking cotton and determined
to find another path for freedom.
I am the slave
who goes to work
in rain, sleet or snow
to earn a living.
I am.

Jacqueline Best, 7-312.

"I think my role in Black History is
to help make the world a better place."
Katrina Jones, 7-322.

"My role in Black History is to
dignify my family and race. I would like
to set an example for younger kids
about what the future can hold for
them, if they know how to use it. I
would like to show the world that my
culture and race is as good as any
other." **Adrian Stafford-Browne,**
7-320.

"My role in Black History is that I'm
free and don't have to be a slave. I'm
special and have an education. I'm free
to do anything I want, and go anywhere
I want. I don't have to ride at the
back of the bus." **Lakeisha Kinsey,**
7-326.

"My role in Black History is being
the great, great, great grandchild of a
slave, and free." **Hifimba Roberts,**
7-322.

"Black History is important to me
because we can't just learn the white
man's story. We need to know the black
man's story, too, and not just
his-story." **Shontaye Miller, 7-312.**

"My role in Black History is trying
to make a change in the community. I
haven't done anything to change people,
but within myself I'm trying to make a
change." **Sha-Kei Powell, 7-320.**

"My role in Black History is to
become a famous doctor, and to inspire
many young blacks to make the best of
their abilities and become successful.
My black people have inspired me as well
and I want to give it all back by being a
famous doctor." **Shala Bonyun,**
7-326.

"My role in Black History is to keep
the light shining and never let it die,
because if it does then we will die with
it." **Lealie Daniel, 7-320.**

"Marcus Garvey always inspired
young black students to get an edu-
cation and have a sense of pride in
their Black Heritage. We, the black
students of today, are playing a big
part in Black History by carrying out
his wish. I am playing a role in Black
History by working in my family, our
community and our nation."
Natasha Jones, 7-312.

